Something good for everyone!

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Manchester Concedes That Kennedy Aides Could

By DOUGLAS ROBINSON

William Manchester conceded yesterday that eyewitnesses to the swearing-in of Lyndon B. Johnson as President might have been mistaken in reporting that no male aides of President Kennedy were present at the tense ceremony in a crowded airplane compartmnet in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

Mr. Manchester, the author of the controversial book, "The Death of a President," said, however, that a recently published photograph showing Kenneth O'Donnell, a Kennedy aide, standing at Mrs. Kennedy's shoulder during the oath taking could also have been misleading.

"The distance between this scene and a corridor where Ken was pacing was approximately three steps," Mr. Manchester said, "and there were five witnesses who saw him in that corridor."

In the third installment of the serialization of his book that is appearing in Look magazine, the author wrote that Mr. O'Donnell walked the corridor "like a caged tiger, his hands clapped over his ears as though to block the oath."

An Hour's Interview

Mr. Manchester discussed his version of the swearing-in ceremony yesterday during an hour-long television interview in Washington on the National Broadcasting Company program "Meet the Press." He also made the following points:

¶It was "overzealous" aides to Senator Robert F. Kennedy who tried to excise passages on political matters rather than the Senator himself, whose views Mr. Manchester described as "generous and laudable."

¶Mrs. Kennedy's objections to some of the material in the book "all were understandable" and comprised less than 1 per cent of the manuscript.

¶Mr. Manchester had turned down a request by the Kennedy family to rewrite his account of President Johnson's first Cabinet meeting because he felt that to do so "would have been a distortion of history, a threat to the integrity of my manuscript."

¶He denied charges that he had been hostile to President Johnson and said, "I think when the book is read, people will realize that I was and still am very sympathetic to President Johnson, who I believe behaved admirably at a time when the rest of us were just barely able to function."

¶He rejected any suggestion that he had violated an agreement with the Kennedy family that called for their approval of the manuscript and maintained that Senator Kennedy, acting on behalf of Mrs. Kennedy, had "liquidated" a memorandum of understanding on publication.

In discussing the photograph showing Mr. O'Donnell at Mrs. Kennedy's side, Mr. Manchester said that other pictures did not show the Kennedy aide to be

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Have Been at Swearing In

in the compartment. He indicated that the closeness of the corridor to the site of the ceremony might have resulted in Mr. O'Donnell's being temporarily on the scene.

Concedes Possible Error

Under questioning, however, he agreed that it was possible that eyewitnesses could be mistaken and that it would be "presumptuous for a contemporary historian . . . to claim that he bats a thousand."

Mr. O'Donnell has said that he stood next to Mrs. Kennedy throughout the ceremony. The picture showing him standing at her side was taken by Cecil Stoughton, the official White House photographer during the Kennedy Administration.

One of the panel of newsmen, Lawrence E. Spivak, said he had been told that the pictures showed five male Kennedy aides at the oath taking and asked, if that were true, whether the author would correct his book.

"It's too late to correct the first edition," Mr. Manchester said, adding that although he was highly skeptical about the report he would correct later editions if the story proved to be true.

In blaming Senator Kennedy's aides for urging cuts in political material, Mr. Manchester appeared to be retreating from earlier statements that the Senator himself was responsible.

The author, for example, was quoted in an interview printed last month in The New York Times as saying that Senator Kennedy wanted to "shred and emasculate" the book for political reasons.

Yesterday, when he was asked to discuss 111 passages that the interviewer said Senator Kennedy wanted deleted, Mr. Manchester broke in to say: "It was not the Senator. It was not the Senator."

When the interviewer, Charles Roberts of Newsweek, rephrased the question to ask if the author believed that the Senator was seeking to get political advantage out of the book, Mr. Manchester replied:

"I never felt that Senator Robert F. Kennedy had that attitude at all. The difficulty arose on lower levels when there were employes who knew that they would be answerable to the Kennedys and who were understandably overzealous in their suggestions."